Charles Dickens: *Great Expectations*

The Genre

1.0: Objective
1.1: Defining the novel
1.2: The rise of the novel
1.3: Different fictional forms
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1.0: Objective

The main objective of this Unit is to acquaint the learner with the the birth and evolution of the novel and also with the tools generally used for its evaluation.

1.1: Defining the novel

Etymologically, the word 'novel' derived from Italian *novella* (feminine of *novello*) means 'new', with *storia*, meaning 'story', understood in the expression. It may be defined as a fictitious prose narrative of 'considerable length'. So it is not short enough to fizzle out before the impression has been set well or characters have been developed fully; nor is it too long, although in our times we have seen *roman-fleuve* or 'novel-river', which runs into several volumes. The novel is often distinguished from the short story, which is another form of literary narrative in prose. The basic difference between the short story and the novel is worth pointing out here. The short story presents not the full face but a focused profile of life in a highly alembicated style. "Concentration on few characters, often one single character; lack of complicated plot and leisurely description; swift *denouement*; economical, dense writing" may be pointed out as the characteristic features of the short story. The novel, on the other hand, presents a panoramic vista of life in a wide canvas studded with many incidents, all not necessarily strictly relevant insofar as they are introduced to elaborate rather than to illustrate.

1.2: The rise of the novel

Attempts have been made to trace the seed of the English novel to the *Arabian Nights*, Boccaccio's *Decameron* and Sidney's *Arcadia*. But this eagerness to provide the novel with a respectable ancestry is, Walter Allen ruefully notes, like writing a history of the motorcar 'by devoting a third of…space to the evolution of the ox-cart'. In England this new literary form flourished towards the middle of the eighteenth century. The contemporary social milieu was conducive to its birth. The social transition from feudalism to capitalism saw a time of great surplus, and thereby more leisure for the middle class people. Leisure is the parent not only of creation but also of consumption; no wonder that the rising middle class got more time for indulgence in literary entertainment. The spread of women education increased the number of idle readers for whom the Shakespearean plays were too profound and Donnesque poetry too complex. They looked for some lighter form of literary entertainment resulting in the birth of the novel. The circulating libraries with rack-full of popular novels-- those 'evergreen' trees of 'diabolical knowledge'-- catered for their dilettantish tastes.

1.3: Different fictional forms

The novel is generally distinguished from romance, fiction and fantasy, the other forms issuing from the parent genre. As storytelling is central to each of these forms and non-metrical language is the vehicle of communication common to all, the distinction to some extent seems

arbitrary. Works predominantly exotic and adventurous (say, those of Scott and Melville) are called 'romance'; the term 'fiction' is used for a narrative like Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, which tends to move marginally beyond realism. But the narrative in which imagination runs riot as in a work like Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is called fantasy. The Picaresque novel, the Gothic novel, the Historical novel, the Psychological novel, the Detective novel, the Epistolary novel, the Symbolic novel, the Stream-of-consciousness novel, the Anti-novel, the Science Fiction *et al* are other sub- forms classified on the basis of the subject matter, the nature of the story, and the narrative device employed to present the same

1.4: The evolution of the English novel

In the eighteenth century the novel was largely a product of 'urban imagination'. Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Moll Flanders* (1972) are immensely popular tales though the complexities of human nature are missing from them. This is also true of the art of Samuel Richardson who is known to have woven a number of epistolary correspondences into the form of *Pamela* (1740). Richardson's works like *Clarissa* (1748) have long been faulted for their middle-class morality -- the typical 'virtue rewarded' theme, and also on account of their 'over elaborate style'. Nevertheless, in his works we have an adumbration of the epistolary form of narration. Henry Fielding, the greatest of the eighteenth century English novelists, is famous for his 'fertility of comic invention'. His works like *Tom Jones* (1749) is rich with that profound human for which Byron hailed him as the 'prose Homer of human nature'. Fielding preferred the picaresque form understandably because it was instrumental in introducing a variety of situations and wide range of characters. Fielding was much ahead of his time in stressing psychological realism, for in *Tom Jones* Blifil who stands upon punctilios impresses us as a hypocrite whereas Tom, despite his sexual incontinence, earns our applause for his magnanimity. Laurence Sterne's metafiction *Tristram Shandy* (1960-67) is considered a classic for its audacious formal experimentation. The established fictional form has here been dismantled through use of blank pages, uneven lineation, whimsical scene shifting and many other tricky narrative devices.

After a fantastic start the English novel declined to a large extent in the last three decades of the eighteenth century. The Gothic novel, also called 'the novel of terror', was the most popular form of the period. In the early nineteenth century, during the hey-days of Romanticism, the novel had another flowering in the works of Sir Walter Scott and Jane Austen. Sir Walter Scott had and unusual interest in the colourful pageantry of the past. This curiosity for the past was however essentially romantic and it impelled him to revive the bygone life and manners in works like *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818) and *Ivanhoe* (1819), Scott's plots are often loose, his characterization lacking in depth. But his art of story telling is literally enviable, *pace* Forster who summarizes *The Antiquary* to prove its insignificance. The blinding rays of Scott's gorgeous works could not altogether eclipse the tender glimmer of Jane Austen's cute masterpieces. While Scott chose for his subject the dazzling diamonds of antique value, Austen's 'sober wishes' never sought to stray beyond the tenor of the domestic sphere -- the 'small square (two inches wide) of ivory'. Her works like *Pride and Prejudice* (written in 1796-7) and *Emma* (1816) mostly focus on the odd complexes of sentimental lovers, marriage and inheritance. But the accentuation of 'the formal qualities of composition', Allen thinks, bears testimony to her being a creator of 'the pure novel' in English.

Apart from Emily Bronte and George Eliot, known for their classics *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and *Middlemarch* respectively, Dickens and Hardy are two great masters of the Victorian novel.

Hardy's novels present the predicament of man who is but a helpless victim of chance and coincidences. His works like *The Return of the Native* or *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, though faulted for their incurable pessimism, contain a vision of life, at once realistic and tragic.

The post-Freudian English novel is predominantly psychological. Among the psychological novelists D. H. Lawrence is chiefly interested in the 'submerged ice-berg of personality' and his works like *Sons and Lovers* (1913) and *The Rainbow* (1915) show how human action and impulses at the social sphere are governed by the instinctual sexual drive, by the unconscious. The urge to explore the unconscious linguistically has led to the invention of new narrative devices, the most important of which is the stream of consciousness technique. In psychology stream of consciousness signifies the flow of consciousness of the waking mind. In literature it is used about the device of representing unspoken thought without the help of dialogue. Though in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* we have an adumbration of this technique of narration, Virginia Woolf and James Joyce are its two most successful exponents in the 20th century. Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) where there is really no linear chrono-topical progress, are the masterpieces of the stream of consciousness novel. Incidentally, since Conrad most modern novelists have shown a penchant for experimenting with the technique of narration. They prefer 'showing' to 'telling', that is, the dramatic style of characterization to the familiar descriptive- narrative style. No wonder that the author's privileged access to the text-world -- be it as an omniscient narrator or an elucidator/commentator – is no longer looked upon as legitimate by many contemporary novelists. Leaving apart Greene's *The Power and the Glory* (1940), Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) and Amis's *Lucky Jim* (1954) the growth of the English novel in the second half of the 20th century has been quantitative rather than qualitative. The lone exception in this regard of course is *Lord of the Flies* (1954), the masterpiece of the Nobel-prize winner William Golding whose novels have re-established the power and potential of the English novel in our times.

1.5: In search of tools for evaluation

Sir Desmond MacCarthy was inclined to regard the novel as 'a bastard form of art' for its preoccupation with diverse human interests and not exclusively with beauty. The form however has never been a 'bastard', though like the epic it is singularly inclusive. It suitably uses not only the lyric and metrics but also the dialogue, which is unique to dramatic art. Of all the principal literary forms, the novel is the junior-most. So it took some time to devise the critical idiom required for its evaluation. The novel critics at first analyzed novels in terms of dramatic terminology like 'plot', 'character' etc. Subsequently, the critical tools of poetry namely 'symbol', 'rhythm', 'irony' etc. and of cinematography like 'flashback', 'showing', 'close-up' were appropriated in the evaluation of novels. Although these continue to be indispensable idioms of modern novel criticism, various fiction-specific terminologies like 'point-of-view', 'omniscient narrator' 'exit author', 'stream-of consciousness' have also been evolved. Mikhail Bakhtin, for example, singles out 'dialogic imagination' as the hallmark of the novel. According to Bakhtin, speech never occurs in vacuum, it is always related to what went before and what comes next. This inter-relatedness is typical of human language. Bakhtin believes that the narrative power of the novel derives from the artful manipulation of *heteroglossia*, which he glosses as "another's speech in another's language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way." The singular space of the novel is to be traced to the coexistence of, and conflict between, multiple voices: of the author, of the narrator and of characters of the novel. So the novelist has an advantage over the poet or the dramatist insofar as he can use dialogues to create polyphony, a kind of discourse in which multiple voices crowd into a single voice. In

Problems of Dostoyevsky's Art Bakhtin shows that Dostoevsky's novels are a true representation of *polyphony*, the true touchstone of fictional narrative.

1.6: Further reading

Arnold Kettle: *An Introduction to the English Novel* I
David Cecil: *Early Victorian Novelists*
Walter Allen: *The English Novel*

The Context

2.0: Objective
2.1: Life of Dickens
2.2: Dickens and the English novel
2.3: Locating Dickens in the tradition
2.4: Victorian England
2.5: Further reading

2.0: Objective

The objective of this Unit is to familiarize the learner with the life and works of Dickens and also with the socio-cultural milieu in which Dickens worked.

2.1: Life of Dickens

Charles Dickens was born at Portsmouth in 1812The Dickens family moved permanently to London in 1822 when Charles was ten years old. No wonder that London with its shabby streets, squalid slums and stagnant waterside always appears on the map of a Dickens novel. In 1823 John Dickens was arrested for being a debt-defaulter and Charles was sent to Warren's blacking factory. After his father's release he was sent to Wellington House Academy, a school run by a tyrannical headmaster. These bitter experiences of his early life inspired him to picture the suffering of persecuted waifs and strays in his early works. In 1827 Charles joined a firm of solicitors as a clerk. There he was exposed to that criminal underworld and that racket of law-peddlers, which we repeatedly come across in the Dickens' works. At this stage of his life Dickens was deeply enamoured of Maria Beadnell whose coldness of treatment Dickens could never forget. She might have been the original for Estella in *Great Expectations*. In 1832, the year of the first Reform Bill, Dickens became a parliamentary reporter, a career that disillusioned him of contemporary parliamentary democracy and moved him to ridicule the parliament of his time as 'the national dust-yard' in *Hard Times*. However, Dickens' experience as a reporter supplied him material for his first book *Sketches of Boz,* Boz being the pseudonym of Dickens. In 1836 Dickens married Catherine, the eldest daughter of George Hogarth after a brief period of courtship.

The rest of Dickens' life was a hectic life of publication and reading tour. The success of *Pickwick Papers* (1837), the immature work of a storyteller struggling to master the art of literary narration, encouraged him to exploit his genius for writing. The first twelve years saw the publication of unforgettable pieces like *Oliver Twist* (1837), *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838), *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840), *Dombey and Son* (1946) and *David Copperfield* (1849). These portray various facets of child-abuse – grim starvation, maltreatment at educational institutions, exhausting labour, unhygienic working conditions, even their criminalization in a rotten society. True, Dickens won a name for himself with these novels and emerged as the most popular, socially conscious novelist of the time. But the works of the second phase of his literary career really bear witness to his greatness as a novelist. 'The overriding single subject of these later novels', Walter Allen points out, is money. No wonder that money-making and legacy-hunting

form the thematic core of *Bleak House* (1852), *Little Dorrit* (1855), *Great Expectations* (1864). *Hard Times* (1854), which comes down heavily on the utilitarian system of education as well as philosophy of life, also touches upon the subject. Though *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) does not fit into the paradigm, the omber note of its Paris chapters is reminiscent of the 'dark' Dickens of the 1860's who wrote in an editorial for *All the Year Round*: 'The mystery of evil is as interesting to us now as it was in the time of Shakespeare, and it is downright affectation and effeminacy to say that we are never to glance into that abyss'. The long and prolific career of Dickens ended in 1870, when he died leaving his last work *Mystery of Edwin Drood* incomplete.

2.2: Dickens and the English novel

Of the early Victorian novelists Charles Dickens is admittedly the greatest. His position as a novelist best understood as a paradox. He is at once the most national and the most international of the English novelists; his works are both avidly read and widely translated. As an artist he is both popular and cultivated. Of all the English novelists Dickens alone has the rare distinction of earning both readerly interest and critical acclaim. Dickens has a histrionic power of hypnotizing his readers, yet he seldom plays to the gallery and hardly ever stoops to conquer. Dickens's novels are an anatomy of the social evils of Victorian society in the true sense of the term. Though he is singularly objective in his study, as an artist he is simultaneously intensely subjective as well -- 'his realism lies only on the surface, and his pictures of London life are magnificent pieces of idealized description' (Compton-Rickett). Of the Victorian novelists George Eliot impresses us as a superior craftsman, Emily Bronte mesmerizes us with her psychological depth, Hardy makes us conscious of the vanity of human passions in a world contingent upon chance and accidents. But if weaving personal feeling into social texture be the hallmark of success of a great novelist, Dickens is in the same class with Balzac, Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy.

2.3: Locating Dickens in the tradition

It is no less a paradox that although F. R. Leavis refuses to grant Dickens any room in his the Great Tradition of English novel, he has no hesitation to place him beside Shakespeare: 'in range and ease there is surely no greater master of English except Shakespeare'. Leavis admits that Dickens is 'permanently among the classics', yet his genius is not the genius of a great artist but that of a 'great entertainer': 'The adult mind doesn't as a rule find in Dickens a challenge to an unusual and sustained seriousness'. Walter Allen meets this charge with a square answer: 'But a tradition of the English novel which has to leave out the only novelist of a Shakespearean order is a pretty shaky one'. Allen rightly describes Dickens as 'essentially a comprehensive artist', Orwell is charmed by his 'fertility or invention' and David Cecil has no hesitation to hail him as 'a prophet'.

Manners and morals, the staple of pre-Dickensian English novels, have been relegated to the backburner in the Dickens world. Dickens is principally a novelist of social protest. His novels expose the staggering evils rampant in the Victorian society, be it a bankrupt debtor's imprisonment or regimented inhumanity in boarding schools or draconic 'poor Law' or juridical delay or the miserable state of factory 'hands' in industrial towns. Dickens is therefore often looked upon as political activist in the guise of a novelist, 'a social reformer who used fiction as a platform for his social appeals'. To say this is not to insinuate that Dickens' novels are destitute of aesthetic significance and our interest in them is merely a historical interest. In reality, far from being period pieces of documentary value his works are of timeless significance, 'a joy forever'. Indeed, the humanitarian note that underlies a Dickens novel is of

perennial appeal. In it we have, on Dickens' own admission, 'a very complicated interweaving of truth with fiction', the true always giving the fictional 'a local habitation and a name'. True, in Dickens we have little introspection and psychoanalysis; but Dickens presents a character in an interactive situation which reveals the inside of his characters and raise them above mere three dimensional portraits.

2.4: Victorian England

Dickens's England was a *bleak house* passing through *hard times* with hardly any *great expectations*. Outwardly it was a time of colonial expansion and material prosperity. But under this garish façade there lurked the ugly face poverty and deprivation. The condition of the working class in the newly growing industrial towns was miserable indeed! Population doubled between 1800 and 1850, and the towns became overcrowded. The wage of the workers was low, housing poor, standard-of-living terrible. The squalor of mining and the defloration of the country green in consequence of the spread of the railway were no longer a cause for concern but for alarm. The insane race for money-making among the Victorian industrialists was encouraged by the doctrine of *laissez faire*. Man's inhumanity to man was almost guaranteed by the philosophy of utilitarianism which equated happiness with pleasure derived from material objects. Many voices protested against this sorry state of affairs. While Carlyle attacked the crass materialism of Victorian England, Matthew Arnold exposed the philistinism of his contemporaries. Marx insisted on the abolition of private property and the Christian Socialists claimed that society must be based on mutual understanding. The Tractarians criticized the latitudinarian tendencies of the Church and the Chartists demanded political reform. Under strong pressure social the parliament was compelled to pass several bills to eradicate these evils. The Reform Acts of 1832, 1867, and 1884 extended suffrage to all men in Great Britain. The Factory Act of 1833 prevented children below the age of nine from working in factories and those under thirteen from working more than nine hours a day. The revised Factory Act of 1844 further reduced the working time of children to six and a half hours and restricted female workers to a twelve-hour day. Transportation for crime was proscribed by law in 1857 and a bill prohibiting imprisonment of debt-defaulters was legislated in 1869. The Education Act of 1870 established School Boards empowered to set up infrastructure for elementary education. It will not be wrong to claim that these reforms with a human face, long overdue, might have been further delayed had not Dickens' novels disturbed the complacency of the Victorians and highlighted the manifold vices, which had eaten into the vitals of an otherwise prosperous society thriving upon colonial expansion all over the globe.

2.5: Further reading

F. R. Leavis: *The Great Tradition*
Allan Grant: *A Preface to Dickens*
H. House: *The Dickens World*

The Content

3.0: Objective
3.1: The story of the novel and critical response
3.2: Theme -- the issue of law
3.3: Theme -- the issue of money
3.4: Theme -- the issue of crime
3.5: Theme -- the question of what makes a gentleman
3.6: The message embodied

3.7: The ending
3.8: Further reading

3.0: Objective

The objective of this Unit is to draw the learner's attention to the thematic aspects of the novel.

3.1: The story of the novel and critical response

Dickens's *Great Expectations* was first serialized in *All The Year Round* and it was published in book form for the first time in 1861. Following is the story of the novel as recounted by Nicola Bradbury:

"The novel follows the fortunes of Pip from 'the small bundle of shivers' at the opening…to the 34-year-old man of the conclusion…. Pip is startled in the churchyard by 'a fearful man' (Magwitch)…who demands a file and food. The child steals from the forge where the lives; but the convict is recaptured struggling with another escaped prisoner (Compeyson). Pip, his secret safe, is carried home by Joe Gargery, his sister's husband and his protector. The next great event in Pip's life is a summons to 'go and play' at Satis House for Miss Havisham, 'an immensely rich and grim lady' who lives in secluded desolation…in her permanently darkened room. She introduces Pip to her ward Estella 'who was very proud'. He loses his heart and learns to despise his humble origins. After a series of visits however, Pip is abruptly dismissed with a premium of £25 to be apprenticed blacksmith… It is at this time that Mrs. Joe is attacked by and unknown assailant, and paralysed. Pip suspects…Orlick, but what disturbs him is that the weapon used was his old convict's (Magwitch's) leg-iron and he feels obscurely responsible for the outrage…. The forge returns to order, with Pip's first teacher, the young Biddy called in to keep house…. In the fourth year of his apprenticeship, Pip is confronted by a gentleman he recognizes as Miss Havisham's lawyer. Mr. Jaggers announces that he has come to release Pip from his indentures and take him to London to become a gentleman. He acts for a 'liberal benefactor' whose name must remain secret. Gladly, Pip leaves home for London and a new life.

"The second stage of Pip's expectations (Second Book) is based in the metropolis and follows him 'educating for a gentleman'…Amidst extravagance and folly he sustains one firm friendship with Herbert Pocket…. Fortune strains his fellowship with Joe…Pip supposes that his 'expectations' are to include a wife (Estella) as well as riches. This dream is destroyed when another visitor appears in Pip's room and reveals himself as Magwitch…He tells Pip that he is the one who has made him a gentleman. All Pip's suppositions have been unfounded: his whole history must be revised, and his future, moreover, adjusted accordingly -- for Pip cannot now accept the convict's money".

"The third stage of the novel (Third Book) traces a profound change…Setting aside all self-interest, Pip tries to provide for Herbert, and to protect Magwitch whose return to England is a capital offence. After clarifying his true relations with Miss Havisham, and forgiving her cruel use of his mistake, he returns to find her 'consuming' in flames, her old pretences destroyed; and he saves her at the cost of injury. He plans to spirit Magwitch abroad, but is secretly called away. Orlick, it appears, knows Pip's movements, he declares his enmity and threatens to kill him. Pip is rescued but…his bid to escape with the convict is foiled. It is the second prisoner from the marshes --coincidentally, the man who wronged Miss Havisham -- who now prevents Magwitch from evading capture. The pursuer dies, Magwitch is half-drowned, captured, sentenced and dies in prison. Pip, meanwhile, has traced the origins of Estella and found that she is the daughter of his benefactor…. After the death of Magwitch, Pip suffers a grave illness: he is nursed by Joe. He thinks of returning to claim Biddy, but finds her married (to Joe)….

Now he…goes abroad to leave his old life behind, and work. Returning, at Satis House he finds only ruins, but amongst them stands Estella. Her unhappy marriage (with Drummle) has softened her and she greets him kindly".

F. R. Leavis in his seminal work on British fiction entitled *The Great Tradition* singles out *Hard Times* as the only novel of Dickens having 'the sustained and complete seriousness' of a great book. But recent critical acclaim on both sides of the Atlantic and even abroad has signally veered towards *Great Expectations*. The first critical response to the novel was far from exhilarating. In a review in *Blackwood's Magazine* (1862) Mrs. Oliphant summarily dismissed the work as 'feeble, fatigued and colourless'. Yet generations of critics have waxed eloquent on this 'seamless, effortlessly controlled, coherent' masterpiece. Allan Grant, for example, is all praise for the work's hallucinatory style -- a style at once symbolic and free from both turgidity and 'rhetorical elaboration'. To quote Grant, 'Dickens wrote nothing finer than the prose of *Great Expectations*'.

3.2: Theme – the issue of law

Although in her article entitled 'How We Must Read *Great Expectations*' Q.D.Leavis attempts to give us a direction of reading *Great Expectations,* the richness of the novel problematizes any so called 'correct' response towards it. It reads like a 'mystery' story, for the plot here pivots on the identity of Pip's secret benefactor and Estella's parentage. But more important than that is the question of Pip's search for identity, his quest for truth and fulfillment. Like Lear's, his identity is achieved through suffering and he suffers for his own share of evil as well as the evil committed by others. The two faces of evil delineated in the novel are human and social. While Pip of the Second Book is guilty of the former, in the other two Books he is a victim of the latter.

'Human' evil is generally considered to be a concomitant of the social evil. The society in which Pip grows up and aspires to fit in is a diseased society. This can be gathered from a study of the phrases used by Dickens to draw the city of London. For example, apart from three *rot*s and four *dismal*s, in a single paragraph in Chapter 21 there is a plethora of phrases like '*dilapidated* blind', '*crippled* flower-pot', '*cracked* glass', '*dusty decay'*, 'gradual *suicide*', '*frowzy* mourning', '*forlorn* creation'. Evidently this society, as Orwell says, is 'wrong somewhere at the root'. In the prison Magwitch ponders over the question 'whether he might have been a better man under better circumstances'. Criminal law has no human face and, whatever its necessity, it cannot be enforced because of the corruption of the agencies through whom it operates. While hearing a case the judge goes to sleep and the magistrates shiver before a bullying barrister. Judgment depends more upon the appearance of the petitioner and his means to engage an able defence counsel than upon the merit of a case. Magwitch is found guilty for he has the look of a criminal whereas Compeyson is forgiven simply because the smartness of his appearance testifies to his 'good character and bad company'. In this 'atmosphere of evil' children are 'imprisoned, whipped, transported…qualified in all ways for the hangman…. forsworn, made orphans, bedevilled', and all this is done in the name of justice. Human life in this system is so cheap that a judge recommends capital punishment to 'two-and-thirty men and women' at a single sitting. Worse still, when somebody breaks the law, the constables persist in fitting 'the circumstances to the ideas, instead of trying to extract ideas from the circumstances'.

3.3: Theme -- the issue of money

This vicious society is given to Mammon worship. Money, especially unearned money or windfall, Dickens shows, is responsible for most of the criminal offences against humanity. In

Hard Times, another novel with acute social concern, Dickens holds up to ridicule the morbid acquisitiveness of the purse-happy Englishmen in Victorian society. There Mr. Gradgrind delights in grinding with gallons of facts the tender brain of the young learners of his model utilitarian school. He sets out to prove with his 'deadly statistical clock' that 'the good Samaritan was a Bad Economist'. In *Great Expectations* too money figures as one of the 'recurrent motifs' of the novel. Pip gets two 'one pound notes' for helping the convict. He gives two guineas to Trabb's boy and an unmentioned sum for Herbert's partnership. Miss Havisham pays £25 for Pip's apprenticeship and Pip receives £500 per annum from his benefactor. But the values of these transactions, as Nicola Bradbury points out, 'are not essentially financial but moral'. Dickens is out to demonstrate the demoralizing effect of money on individual mind as well as on human relations. The promise of fortune brings about a great change in Pip's attitude to Joe. He is ashamed of Joe's presence in his society and says; 'If I could have kept him away by paying money, I certainly would have paid money'. Mr. Trabb attends Pip deferentially when he comes to know that Pip has 'great expectations'. Uncle Pumblechook, the shameless timeserver who would persecute Pip with utmost inhumanity all through his impecunious childhood, starts toadying and makes obsequious movements to catch Pip's attention from the moment a 'liberal benefactor' comes forward as his sponsor. Dickens shows that in a capitalist social even human relationship is determined by the power of filthy lucre. One can transcend lowness and pass for a gentleman if only one has money enough to squander. At the very promise of fortune Pip contracts expensive habits and Magwitch returns to England to 'see my gentleman spend his money like a gentleman'. The cadaverous monomaniac, Miss Havisham has a number of sycophantic relatives swarming around her simply because she is fabulously wealthy. But what is most disconcerting in this rapacious world is that the rich man has a skeleton in the cupboard. When the mysterious man sent by Magwitch gives Pip 'two fat sweltering one pound notes' he feels that he is 'on secret terms of conspiracy with convicts'. This fear of complicity in crime proves true when it is finally revealed that Pip owes his fortune not to his 'fairy godmother' Miss Havisham, but to a law-breaker and his rise has been a reward for theft. Now all Pip's great expectations dissolve like 'marsh mists before the sun'. This reminds us of Richard Carstone who too was ruined by the delusive prospect of legacy in the Jarndyce and Jarndyce case in *Bleak House*. Pip is not wholly unconscious of the vapoury nature of unearned wealth symbolically presented here. He knows that since he has 'done nothing to raise myself in life, and that Fortune alone has raised me', he is 'exposed to hundreds of chances'. But Pip lacks the magnanimity of Joe who refuses the compensation offered by Jaggers for the termination of Pip's apprenticeship. Nor has he the gratitude of Magwitch who can burn the 'clean and new' notes Pip gives him to pay off an old debt. Pip is thus not altogether a misfit in this mercenary society. It is only when he outgrows this lust for 'portable property' and begs money of Havisham, not for himself but for Herbert, that Pip is redeemed and attains humanity.

3.4: Theme -- the issue of crime

Money-mindedness causes withering of human values and thereby augments criminal offences perpetrated against fellow members of society. No wonder that the novel has criminality as one of its underlying themes. In Pip's world one can hardly open the petals of the mind without being conscious of felony. The first most vivid experience of life that Pip can recall is his encounter with Magwitch, a convict 'with a great iron on his leg'. It is for him that Pip steals a file and thus is unwittingly inducted into the world of crime. From Magwitch Pip comes to learn that Compeyson's real business is 'swindling, handwriting forging, stolen bank-note

passing, and such-like'. The lawyer Jaggers is always surrounded by criminals and outlaws; he is so much involved in the festering atmosphere of crime that when he comes back from the court he cannot help using a 'scented soap' to wash off the symbolic felonious stain of his hands. The curiosities in Wemmick's collection are mostly of felonious type and in order to meet Estella Pip beats the prison dust off his clothes. Dorothy Van Ghent argues that Pip 'carries the convict inside' and G.R, Strange thinks that Pip has a guilty conscience because 'criminality is the condition of life' in this putrefying world. It is worth noting that although Pip feels that he has 'Newgate in my breath and on my clothes', his actual share of wrongdoing is not too large. Julian Moynahan brilliantly shows that though Pip cannot be convicted of many acts of criminal violence, 'he must be condemned on the principle of guilt by association'. According to Moynahan, Orlick represents Pip's predatory criminal instincts – he is 'a distorted and darkened mirror image' of Pip's self. The criminal violence that Orlick is guilty of, therefore, may be ascribed to Pip, for these may be considered as vicariously committed by the protagonist of the novel. Moreover, whoever comes close to Pip as and authority figure or stands in the way of his dreams invariably gets scathed. The tyrannical Mrs. Joe is hurt by Orlick who embodies Pip's criminal impulses. Pumblechook's house is looted and his prating mouth is gagged with annuals. Estella who breaks Pip's heart by marrying Drummle suffers at the hands of her husband who too is a criminal psychopath and therefore 'a reduplication of Orlick on a higher socio-economic scale'. And Miss Havisham not merely burns herself but is twice crucified in Pip's hallucinatory fantasy:'towards a great wooden beam…I saw a figure hanging there by the neck….the face was Miss Havisham's.

3.5: Theme – the question of what makes a gentleman

A vile society engenders corrupt values as is evident from an analysis of the nature of the characters in *Great Expectations* who pass for gentlemen in this rotten system. Incidentally, 'gentleman' is a loaded word in *Great Expectations*. The 'Gentle Knight…pricking on the plain' in Spenser's *Faerie Queene* was a man 'of chivalrous instincts and fine feelings' (*OED* Sense 3). Towards the beginning of the eighteenth century the word came to mean 'a man of superior position in society; often a man of money and leisure' (*OED* Sense 4). So in post-feudal England capitalist English society the criterion of gentility was birth / social rank or wealth, not politeness or altruism. Many voices were raised against this vulgarization of norms and eventual degeneration of signification. Fielding's novels expose the vanity of landlords with pretensions to genteel taste. In Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* one of the companions of Tony Lumpkin scoffs at the vainglorious gentleman when he says 'what, though I am obligated to dance a bear, a man may be a gentleman for all that'. Dickens too lunches into a search for what makes a true gentleman in *Great Expectations*. He has presented a number of characters who represent pseudo-gentility. Compeyson is a criminal but in the court he looks like a gentleman simply for his spruce get-up. The current concept of gentleman has been caricatured through the ill-mannered boor Drummle, the next heir but one to a baronetcy, and Mrs. Pocket, Herbetrt's good-for–nothing mother who had been cautiously 'guarded from the acquisition of plebian domestic knowledge' by her father on the supposition that 'his deceased father would have been made a Baronet'. The convict Magwitch asks Pip for some of his 'gentleman's linen' to cover up his identity. He voices the false idea of gentility when he says: "I mustn't see my gentleman a-footing it in the mire of the streets; there mustn't be no mud on his boots. My gentleman must have horses, Pip. Horses to ride, and horses to drive, and horses for his servant to ride and drive as well'. Evidently, all the luxuries that money can buy are here mistaken for the attributes of a gentleman. Judged from this angle, Joe with Adam's curse upon

his head is not a gentleman but the eccentric Miss Havisham who has moneyed leisure for the cultivation of her idle sentiments is one. The fallacy of this attitude has been best exposed by John Ball who raised the following question in the 14th century: 'When Adam delved and Eve span who was then the gentleman?' Pip at first tries to conform to these standards of gentility according to which one cannot 'be genteel and bake' but 'may be as genteel as never was and brew'. Hypnotized by the sophisticated airs of Miss Havisham and Estella Pip at first comes to loathe Joe's 'thick' boots and 'coarse' hands and 'wished Joe had been rather more genteelly brought up'. His own commonness fills his heart with shame: 'I wished I was not common'. In order to *become* a gentleman he contracts 'expensive habits', for a gentleman in the sense of an affluent idler is supposed to live on inherited property a life of 'leisured dissipation' and squander ample money to satisfy his lavish tastes. But Pip realizes the hollowness of social pretensions when he sees that even a criminal can 'make' a gentleman and be the father of one (Estella) who is admired in society for being genteel. Pip's 'snob's progress' is actually a progress from *OED* Sense 4 to sense 3. With the dawn of consciousness he starts defying false values and refashions his life by acknowledging true relations. He withstands the lure of money, forgives Miss Havisham, overcomes his pathological repugnance to Magwitch and expresses sincere regret to Joe for being ungrateful to him: 'Look angry at me, Joe. Strike me, Joe. Tell me of my ingratitude. Don't be so good to me!' Newman believes that a gentleman is a man who never inflicts pain. Such a man not only abstains from hurting others with hand or tongue but has true regards for other people's sentiments. Judged in the light of this definition, Compeyson, Miss Havisham, Drummle and Mrs. Pocket are brutes but Aged Parent is 'an old gentleman' and Joe is 'a gentle Christian man' ('gentle' being one of Christ's attributes). Towards the end even Magwitch sinks upon Pip's breast 'gently'. The Dickensian view on the subject is held by Matthew Pocket who believes that 'no man who was not a true gentleman at heart, ever was, since the world began, a true gentleman in manner…. no varnish can hide the grain of the wood; and that the more varnish you put on, the more grain will express itself'. Through the career of Pip whose weakness for property finally gives way to an acquisition of humanity, Dickens stresses the point that gentility is to be regarded as a quality of character that has nothing to do with social status or material possession.

3.6: The message embodied

The Victorian society was a society of conflicting allegiance and divided aims Identity crisis is inevitable in a society that is not very sure about the values to be prized and sustained. One 'strategy for survival' at this critical juncture is self-division as found in the case Dr. Jekyll–Mr. Hyde in Stevenson's novel. This is different from self-duplication illustrated by the double face of Jack/Ernest in Oscar Wilde's play *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Wemmick adopts the former course of survival, for he believes that, to borrow Allan Grant's words, "the world's evils are not to be overridden, only circumvented and accommodated". But Dickens who like Tagore was never sceptical about the ultimate triumph of human goodness refuses to endorse this pragmatic compromise of Wemmick. Shaw's remark that had Dickens ever become conscious of Karl Marx 'he would have been classed with him as a revolutionist' is only a speculation. But what is a fact is Dickens was never a social iconoclast and 'revolution' was never on his literary agenda if we do not use the term as a mere synonym for change. Actually Dickens criticized his society from a moral angle, not to dismantle the existing structure but to reform it.

Philanthropy is the Dickensian cure-all not only for human evils but also for most social evils. Magwitch is transformed as a man when he is moved by Pip's fearful benevolence as well as

the broadness of Joe's heart: 'We don't know what you have done, but we wouldn't have you starved to death for it, poor miserable fellow creature'. Pip is also redeemed by an expansion of heart. Although pining for the love of Estella, he never envies Clara's love for Herbert: 'I would not have undone the engagement between her and Herbert, for all the money in the pocket-book I had never opened'. Miss Havisham's treatment of Estella and Pip is recognizably inhuman, hence self-defeative in the long run. This has been shown in a powerfully conceived scene where Miss Havisham reproaches Estella for being insensitive and cold. Estella retorts: 'I am what you have made me… if you ask me to give you what you never gave me, my gratitude and duty cannot do impossibilities… I must be taken as I have been made. The success is not mine, the failure is not mine'. At last Miss Havisham recognizes the folly of stealing Estella's heart away and putting ice in its place. She now sees that it is wrong to hold humanity culpable for the wicked infidelity of her lover and falls on her knees at Pip's feet. The governor of the prison who grants Pip extra time to talk to Magwitch is also not an authority figure but a Man with a capital M. How narrow-mindedness atrophies the soul may also be gathered from *Hard Times* where Dickens outlines the evils of utilitarian worldview. In a climactic scene in the novel Gradgrind, the promoter of fact-based-fancy-free utilitarian education, appeals to the 'heart' of one of his former pupils to spare his son found guilty of embezzlement of bank funds. Gradgrind's model student Bitzer, however, refuses to oblige his master because to him 'heart' is only a blood-pumping organ, which has nothing to do with softer emotions like love. No wonder that he looks upon his schooling as a mere 'bargain' across the counter: 'I was made in the cheapest market and have to dispose of myself in the dearest'. The human note struck by a novel like *Great Expectations* helps us re-discover the value of magnanimity minus which man is no better than 'forked animal' to be pitied rather than revered.

3.7: The ending

The present ending of the novel has always been a subject of dispute. Chapter 59 was not in the earlier version. The first few lines of the existing last chapter came at the end of chapter 58, rounded off with a paragraph in which Estella, now married to a Shropshire doctor after the death of Drummle, meets Pip. Chastened by suffering, Estella now has a heart to understand what Pip's 'heart used to be'. She shakes hands with Pip, kisses young Pip mistaking him for Pip's child and then they part forever. This ending was revised at the instance of Bulwer Lytton. In the present form Pip has a chance meeting with Estella in the desolate Satis House. Tempered by suffering, they draw closer to each other and walk out hand in hand with no shadow of another parting' hanging between them. It is to be noted that Dickens not only changed the ending but stood by the change: "I have no doubt the story will be more acceptable through the alteration". However, many of those who trust the tale, not the artist, feel that the cancelled ending is better. Dickens' biographer Forster preferred the earlier ending as 'more consistent with the drift, as well as natural working out, of the tale'. Shaw who praised the 'scene the hour, the atmosphere' of chapter 59 had even restored the original ending in an edition in 1937 because it was he thought psychologically right. Martin Meisel puts forward his theory about a 'redemptory second birth' and argues that the novel really ends at the point where Pip returns to Joe's house and finds his little likeness there. He contends that the novel comes full circle when Pip sets young Pip, his own incarnation, on the tombstone and 'replaces Magwitch as spiritual father to the child christened with his name'. The rejected last portion is, according to him a 'reinforcing postscript to the conclusion proper' and the present ending is only a 'tidying postscript'. However those who find the present controversial ending as aesthetically less satisfying than the original miss the point that it is not intended to be nor does

it strike a sensible reader as a conventional happy ending. It is not at all a celebration of union of lovers long separated from each other and a Dickensian concession to the formula of poetic justice. It is a union of two maturer spirits sobered by their long suffering. This accounts for the subdued tone of the ending. It is a 'joint venture', *pace* Meisel, in possibility, although marked by 'sad serenity'. Bradbury defends the coda for being open ended: 'where the suppressed ending offers the consolation of a closure, the one substituted resists conclusion'. And yet, the earlier ending seems more appropriate. Pip may receive a reward for his one unselfish act of helping Herbert in his distress. But it is improbable that he will get Estella as a prize for his blind infatuation. In short, the present ending may be justified but the cancelled ending is probably better. Shaw described the first ending as 'the truly happy ending' not for nothing. What he wittily insinuates seems to be that it not be happy for Pip and Estella but it must be a happy ending for the readers because it is consistent with what the novel reveals about the life of Pip and Estella.

3.8: Further Reading

Angus Calder(ed): *Great Expectations*
Martin Price(ed): *Dickens: A Collection of Critical Essays*
Norman page(ed): *Great Expectations* (Casebook)

The Form

4.0: Objective
4.1: Language
4.2: The narrative angle and device
4.3: Irony, humour, symbol
4.4: Characterization
4.5: The portrait of Pip
4.6: Further reading

4.0: Objective

The main objective of this Unit is to sensitize the learner about the saliet stylistic features employed by Dickens in *Great Expectations.*

4.1: Language

Dickens' works are often criticized on the score of repetitive overdoing and loose inclusiveness. But as he matured Dickens outgrew his juvenile weakness for flowery language and ornate style. Allan Grant quotes from *Great Expectations* a portion of the river-journey passage and Angus Calder refers to the passage in which Biddy describes the death of Mrs Joe as samples of Dickens's inimitable prose -- simple yet profound, elaborate and sinewy. True, there are some expressions even in this novel which may be taken as vestiges of Dickens's earlier florid style. Consider the last sentence of Chapter 8 or the introduction of the convict Magwitch: 'A man who had been soaked in water, and smothered in mud, and lamed by stones, and cut by flints; and stung by nettles, and torn by briars; who limped, and shivered, and glared and growled; and whose teeth chattered in his head as he seized me by the chin'. But such prolixity is very rare in *Great Expectations* and on the whole Dickens purges his language of all flabbiness. Certain phrase like 'brought…. up by hand' or 'portable property' are so surcharged with significance that they have, as Eliot observes, an existence even outside the book.

4.2: The narrative angle and device

As in *David Copperfield* here also the story is recounted in the First Person, for it is Pip the narrator who reminisces about his own childhood and the development of his consciousness. The narrative voice at times sounds *omniscient* as when Pip comments on his sister's sternness: 'In the little world in which children have their existence whosoever brings them up, there is nothing so finely perceived and so finely felt, as injustice'. Interestingly, the adult Pip always recounts the reactions of his younger self to external stimulus very analytically. For instance, when Magwitch comes to visit his 'gentleman' in his London house, Pip instinctively shrinks from him. The adult Pip's evaluates the response in the following language: 'If I had loved him instead of abhorring him…it would have been better, for his preservation would then have naturally and tenderly addressed my heart'. Consequently, Pip the narrator can be distanced from Pip the narrated. John O. Jordan has probably this complex fusion of confession and commentation in mind when he observes that autobiography, for Pip 'means more than telling the truth about his life; it is also a way of finding out the truth'.

The narrative proceeds chronologically, though Magwitch's account of his past life is in the nature of a *flashback* Dickens has enlivened the narrative with dialogues, even imaginary conversation. Consider, for example, what Pip thinks he would tell Biddy when he meets her with an humbled and repentant heart (Ch 54). As a novelist Conrad wished 'to make you, *hear*, to make you *feel* -- it is before all to make you *see*'. Long before Conrad, Dickens employed the cinematographic device of *showing* in the narrative texture of *Great Expectations*. The appearance of Herbert at Barnard's Inn may be cited as example: 'Gradually there arose before me the hat, head, neckcloth, waistcoat, trousers, boots, of a member of society of about my own standing'.

4.3: Irony, humour, symbol

The three spectra of Dickens' narrative prism in *Great Expectations* are irony, humour and symbolism. The structure of the novel is soaked in irony. Monroe Engel rightly observes that while *David Copperfield* is a success story of 'pathetic' tone, *Great Expectations* describes 'a movement away from success… its dominant mood ironic'. The very title has been ironically conceived, for the novel is, after all, 'an inverted fairy tale' -- it exposes the hollowness of Pip's dreams and the futility of 'great expectations'. Pip frees Magwitch from his leg-iron, ironically, only to forge a bond with him that he cannot snapped all through his life. At first Pip aspires to be a gentleman but, ironically, he at first impresses us as less than a gentleman, a snob. It is no less ironical that subsequently Pip emerges as a true gentleman with a golden heart, although Magwitch wanted to bring him up as a smart 'social' (pseudo) gentleman. Miss Havisham brings up Estella to break other people's heart, but, ironically enough, she herself has to harvest the fruit of the poison tree, for she has her heart broken and smashed by Estella. The irony of ironies seems to be that though Pip fights shy of Joe to be a gentleman, it is Joe with his un-gentleman-like appearance who rescues Pip from the jaws of death in London. Furthermore, it is from his association with Joe that Pip learns that gentility consists in generosity of behaviour rather than ostentatious parade of wealth and luxury.

Dickens is ranked among the world's great humorists like Addison, Lamb and Chaplin. Unlike wit, which is caustic, humour is tolerant and sympathetic. The Dickensian humour even when used as a satirical device is too soft to make us bleed. Consider, for example, the following description: 'Sometimes so much of tar-water was administered to Pip by Mrs. Joe as a choice restorative that he was conscious of going about 'smelling like a new fence'. John Forster in *Charles Dickens* holds that Dickens's humour is at its best in *Great Expectations*. It is wrong to conclude that Dickensian humour blunts the edge of social criticism. Pip's humorous comment

that the Pocket children 'were not growing up or being brought up, but were tumbling up' cannot be enjoyed without being conscious of Mrs. Pocket's criminal negligence of child-care. Often a character is sketched with one stroke of humour. The following sentence for example, vividly draws the professionalism of the redoubtable barrister Jaggers: 'He cross-examined his very wine when he had nothing else in hand'. Compton-Rickett describes Dickens's humour as 'rainbow humour' where the author smiles at us through his tears. True, there is a grain of truth in this conclusion; yet it would be wrong to aver that the nucleus of Dickens' humour is invariably pathos. Rather there is much truth in Orwell's point that Dickens's humour depends on 'the unnecessary detail'. Consider, for example, Pip's casual comment on the slushy voice of the Thames-side scavenger 'as if much mud had washed down his throat'. Also consider the reference to his grotesque appearance -- 'probably, it took about a dozen drowned men to fit him out completely; and that may have been the reason why the different articles of his dress were in various stages of decay'.

The image structure of *Great Expectations* like that of *Hard Times* is richly symbolic. An image, a verbal icon, or an idea, incidentally, acquires symbolic import when it is recurrently used in a work. A symbol often reveals the substratum of significance and thus communicates the incommunicable and bridges the gap between the signifier and the signified. In *Great Expectations* the very opening of the novel in the graveyard is highly symbolic. It not only sets the tone for the solemn tale but merges into another grave symbol – the Satis House. With 'the *ashes* of bridal feast' before her, Miss Havisham in her '*shroud* of a dress' that resembles '*grave*-clothes' looks like a corpse. Since light stands for life, 'no glimpse of daylight' is admitted into her room. The mildewed cake with 'speckled-legged spiders' upon it symbolizes embalming of animation, which is also suggested by the fact that all her clocks have stopped running. Interestingly, Drummle is 'Spider' to Jaggers; he walks in the 'shadow of the house' and is killed in 'an accident consequent on his ill-treatment of a horse', which is generally regarded as a symbol of life. Fire is an emblem of life and warmth. The furnace in the smithy is 'red-hot'. In London, Pip feels that 'there was no fire like the forge fire and the kitchen fire at home'. For a diseased obsession with her past Miss Havisham is dead to all intentions and purposes. Small wonder that she is nearly consumed with 'a whirl of fire blazing all about her'. While the 'square impregnable bib' of Mrs. Joe with 'pins and needles' on it signalizes her stern nature, the unfettered. Thames stands for exaltation. Society imprisons a man in illusions, nature delivers his soul from meanness and prejudice. While boating down the Thames Magwitch as well as Pip enjoys 'the delights of freedom'. This may be contrasted with Pip's neurasthenic nightmare that he is 'a brick in the house wall…. Entreating to be released from the giddy place where the builders had set me'. 'Mist' is a key-symbol in the novel. It mainly stands for blurred vision, shortsightedness and misunderstanding. Pip supplies the convict with a file on a '*rimy*' morning. As he sets out for London, the light *mists* solemnly rise as if to show him the world. Pip's great expectations dissolve 'like our own marsh *mists* before the sun'. Years after their separation when Pip meets Estella in the desolate Satis House 'a cold silvery *mist* had veiled the afternoon, and the moon was not yet up to scatter it'. As they come close to each other the *mist* is seen 'touched with the first rays of the moonlight'. When, finally, they walk out of the ruined place, the 'evening *mists*' are seen rising 'as the morning mists had risen long ago when I first left the forge'. Certain other motifs are also invested with symbolic import. One such is 'feast', another 'hand'. Pip imagines that his now dead brothers were born 'on their backs with their *hands* in their trousers-pockets'. Pip is brought up 'by *hand*', which points to the sternness shown to the boy by his own sister; Estella finds Pip's *hands* that are

coarse and Pip is ashamed of Joe's coarse *hands*. Miss Havisham has 'withered' *hands* and Biddy's *hands* are 'roughened by work'. Molly's *wris*' is scarred 'across and across' and Jaggers is in the habit of washing his *hands* with scented soap. Pumblechook shakes *hands* with Pip deferentially; Wimmick notes that Pip is 'in the habit of shaking *hands*'. Before his death Magwitch gives 'a gentle-pressure' on Pip's *hand* and Pip takes Estella's '*hand* in mine' as they walk forward to begin a new life. The symbolic structure of the novel has been emblazoned with an intricate texture of animal imagery. Magwitch eats like a *dog*; Pip recoils from him as if he were a *snake*. Drummle creeps like some 'uncomfortable *amphibious creature'*. He is a *spider* to Jaggers. Pumblechook is a 'windy *donkey*'. Molly is a '*beast* tamed'. The manners of Mrs. Coiler strike Pip as '*snaky and fork-tougued'*. Orilick's mouth *snarls* 'like a *tiger's'*. Before his final attack on Pip he pours the last few drops of liquor into his palm and *licks* it up like a beast. Compeyson is a *rodent*, for Miss Havisham complains that 'sharper teeth than the teeth of *mice* have gnawed at me'. Pip is a *monkey* to Mrs. Joe and a *wolf* to Orlick. Estella gives him bread and meat as insolently as if he were 'a *dog* in disgrace'. Admittedly, Dickens's creative imagination in this novel about human evil, about man slipping into a bestial state, has expressed itself through a network of animal imagery, at once rich and powerful.

4.4: Characterization

Dickens' forte may be the art of narration, but characterization is commonly believed to be his Achilles' heel. Objections to Dickens's art of character-portraiture are not negligible in number. It is alleged that most of his characters are 'flat' and their behaviour hardly ever reaches beyond predictability; that they are either black or white, lacking in the complex hues that make a man; that Dickens portrays them from outside without conducting us within; that his great characters are so stereotypical that they 'could step out of one book into another without materially disturbing the arrangement of either'; that most of his women characters are on the whole anaemic and two dimensional. And yet, it is unjust to maintain that Dickens' characters are 'conventional virtuous or vicious dummies of melodrama'. Broadly speaking, they may be classified into two groups -- Normal and Abnormal. While most protagonists and some female and minor characters in a Dickens novel are 'Normal', the rest are 'Abnormal' not in the sense of 'cranky' but in the sense of 'removed from the ordinary average human being by reason of certain peculiarities of temperament' (Compton-Rickett). All the comic portraits, villains and grotesque faces in Dickens are Abnormal in this sense of the term. The comic characters may be divided into two groups. Some like Wemmick, the ever-dutiful son whose temperamental softness is cloaked under 'a post-office of a mouth', are 'accepted without the intervention of moral scruple'. But this play of humorous fancy is not found in satirical portraits like Uriah Heep, Gradgrind or Pumblechook. The villains in Dickens are incorrigibly black, mostly devoid of any human quality. The grotesque in the Abnormal group are extraordinarily successful creations and here Dickens is literally unsurpassable. Not only characters like Jaggers but also psychopaths like Miss Havisham who is a prisoner of her past, belong to this group.

Although ingenious, these classifications do not take us to the heart of Dickensian characterization. Dickens actually uses the device of parallelism and contrast in portraying his characters. Martin Price rightly observes that in Dickens 'no single character exists without his counterpart of contrast'. Magwitch is Pip's double; he is what Pip would have been had he not by chance come across the convict. Magwitch is also Miss Havisham's double, for both wreak a vicarious revenge on society -- Magwitch by flaunting a gentleman before its face and Miss Havisham by breaking the heart of men through Estella. Mrs. Pocket who is unmoved by the loss of needles that might injure her own children is Drummle's counterpart since both

represent faded aristocracy. Apart from parallelism Dickens also employs the device of contrast in characterization.. Compeyson is a foil to Abel Magwitch who is not a criminal by nature. Mark that the Christian name of the convict is *Abel,* not *Cain*. Orlick who is infinitely murderous is Joe's opposite, for the latter is Pip's 'unassertive protecting' genius, his 'Ministering angel'. Joe and Jaggers are also each other's contrasts. Joe always does his duty 'with a strong hand, a quiet tongue, and a gentle heart' and he lives by truth to feeling. His only rival seems to be John Jarndyce in *Oliver Twist*, the model of disinterested goodness, and "the best and kindest man ever to appear in a novel", according to Validimir Nabokov. Jaggers is highly formal and singularly allergic to feeling ('I'll have no feelings here') and even a judge trembles before his tongue. Estella is a foil to Clara and Biddy, While Estella is 'cold' and 'proud' and has no 'natural heart…to be bruised and broken', Biddy is sweet-tempered, and there is something 'natural and winning' in Clara's look.

4.5: The portrait of Pip

Dickens is a writer of novels of social realism illustrated by novels like *Hard Times*, as distinct from novels of psychological realism of which Fielding's *Tom Jones* is the best example. No wonder Dickens found type characters appropriate for his novelistic vision. To say this is not to imply that all of Dickens' characters are drawn in monochromes lacking in development and complexity characteristic of life. Take for instance the character of Miss Havisham whose heart, we finally see, is 'not all stone'. At the end she sincerely regrets her blunder ('what have I done!') and begs Pip's pardon. Estella too is chastened by her suffering: 'I have been bent and broken, but I hope -- into a better shape'. Pip's portrait is a feather in the cap of Dickens the artist. The novel carefully charts the development Pip's character. In the course of the novel, Pip changes from a 'small bundle of shivers' to an energetic businessman and an active partner in the firm of Clarriker and Herbert. But more important than this rise along social ladder is his development from what Angus Calder says 'a moral nonentity to a moral hero'. It is wrong to call it a 'snob's progress', for Pip the first step in the progress is outgrows the snobbery contracted from his association with Miss Havisham and Estella. As a child he, like others of his age, is naïve and good-natured. Consider, for example how simplistically he construes the inscription on the tombstone of his mother -- 'Also Georgiana, Wife of the Above' -- as a 'complimentary reference to my father's exaltation to a better world'. Though he steals food for the convict under the threat of death, he is 'glad' to see him enjoy his meal. But this goodness gradually evaporates after his first visit to Satis House and he gradually becomes a snob -- a snob being one who is subservient to superiors but arrogant to inferiors. Though treated by Estella 'as if I were a dog in disgrace', he starts adoring her and finds fault with his poor upbringing. He is repelled by Joe's 'thick boots' and 'coarse hands'. He is ashamed of the presence of 'the dear good fellow Joe' before Estella and Miss Havisham. He teaches Joe whatever he acquires from other sources not prompted by fellow feeling but to make him 'worthier of my society and less open to Estella's reproach'. Before leaving for London, he plans to entertain the poor villagers with 'gallons of condescension'. At London he is embarrassed by Joe's visit and his 'clumsy manner'. Even the 'uncouth' actions of his benefactor shock him, but, surprisingly enough, he connives at Estella's hauteur. True, 'Snobbery is not a crime'; yet it is often, as Moynahan argues, inseparable from certain types of criminal behaviour'. Like murder, it is an offence against 'persons rather that property'. And yet, we are sympathetic to Pip not because 'even snobbery pales' beside graver evils committed by Orlick, Compeyson and Drummle but Pip redeems himself by outgrowing the infection of snobbery. Pip's career maps not the defeat of his moral will but its ultimate triumph after

momentary eclipse. Small wonder that Dickens scrupulously reveals how Pip proceeds from snobbish to human values. Pip never relishes but suffers from constant uneasiness about his ingratitude to Joe. He admits that the feeling of shame about Joe's profession is born of his 'ungracious breast' that he is the swindler of swindlers, that he is a 'monster' to abuse Joe's hallowed name. Apart from self-criticism, on realization of his folly he acts generously in order to compensate for his earlier inhumanity. Here he differs from Macbeth who, despite his vestigial goodness of nature becomes desperate after the murder of Duncan and has hardly any good deed to his credit to condone his lapses. Even before the appearance of Magwitch and consequent shattering of his 'great expectations', he evinces much consideration for Herbert. Having come of age he spends half of his annual allowance for Herbert's placement at Clarriker's House. Though in acute financial straits, he is reluctant to accept Magwitch's money. Pip rather requests Miss Havisham to help Herbert without his knowledge and rejoices at his progress. He overcomes his antipathy against Magwitch, 'the hunted wounded shackled creature' and goes to the limekiln for his sake -- 'in case any harm should befall him through my not going'. He learns humility and tells Trabbs boy that he is 'sorry ever to have had an ill opinion of him'. When Miss Havisham requests him to forgive her, he consoles her with words which do not smack of presumption:' I want forgiveness and direction far too much to be bitter with you'. He atones for his ungratefulness to Joe by resigning himself to Joe's tender care. Now that he is redeemed, the cold formality of 'sir' grates on him and such familiar addresses as 'old chap' are 'music in my ears'. Though unprepared for Biddy's marriage, he accepts Joe as the 'best husband in the whole world' for Biddy. Even when he offers to repay his debt he does so with due politeness: 'don't think…if I could repay it a thousand times over, I suppose I could cancel a farthing of the debt I owe you, or that I would do so if I could!' Pip thus succeeds in redeeming himself from his snobbish vices. The development in this character has been made convincing not only by giving the story a confessional touch but, as Christopher Ricks has rightly pointed out, by maintaining the right tone of confession: "Open but not abased, willing to admit faults but not positively enjoying it'.

4.7: Further reading

Elizabeth Drew: *The Novel*
Nicola Bradbury: *Great Expectations*